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MIRA FY10 Final Senate Budget Analysis

On May 21, 2009, the Senate passed the final version of their budget. Despite raising revenue through the passage of an increase in the sales tax and local option taxes, the budget included severe cuts to all areas of government. Numerous programs and groups saw their funding slashed or eliminated, and the immigrant community was hit particularly hard.

MIRA's priorities took deep cuts and, in some situations, immigrants were targeted in efforts to cut costs and close the budget gap. In particular, **Outside Section 77 of the Senate Ways & Means budget cut eligibility for "special status" immigrants in Commonwealth Care**, a cut that, if finalized, would drive **28,000 legal immigrants** currently on the program into Emergency Medicaid services or the Health Safety Net. This cut represents 15% of Commonwealth Care enrollment and is the first major setback in coverage since the passage of health reform legislation.

In another instance, **the Citizenship Services line item was cut by 50% from the House budget down to \$250,000 and 62% from initial FY09 levels**. These low levels of funding threaten the ability of providers to maintain their programs and provide needed services to low-income immigrants who wish to become naturalized U.S. citizens.

As a member of the **Stop the Cuts Coalition**, MIRA recognizes the importance of increasing revenues to fund the vital programs and services upon which many jobs and lives depend. We need new and substantial revenue sources if we hope restore funding to the programs that help change lives and give hope to so many.

As the budget process resumes in Conference Committee, MIRA and its allies are committed to seeking the best results for programs serving immigrant communities across the Commonwealth and to restoring coverage for 28,000 legal immigrants whose well-being relies on a return to the promise and values of health reform and the goal of insuring all residents of Massachusetts.

The following is an analysis of how the final Senate budget impacted each of MIRA's budgetary priorities:

Outside Section 77 of the final Senate budget cuts eligibility for "special status" immigrants in Commonwealth Care, with the requirement of 45 days notice prior to termination. The cut in eligibility, if finalized, would drive 28,000 legal immigrants, including new legal permanent residents (green card holders) without 5 years in a qualified status, into Emergency Medicaid and the Health Safety Net. The eligibility cut is contrary to the Commonwealth's stated

goal of insuring all residents, undermines the values and goals of Health Reform, and shifts costs to the already overburdened safety net health care system.

Senator Chang-Diaz filed an amendment to strike the outside section and restore eligibility; however, because of the estimated savings of almost \$130 million from the cut, the Senator's amendment was denied by Senate leadership. Over the next few days the Senator and representatives from MIRA, MA Law Reform Institute, and Health Care for All worked on different degrees of compromise language to delay the eligibility cut and provide notice to those affected. Because each month's delay would cost the state more than \$12 million, the final compromise that was reached was 45-day notice of termination of coverage to allow individuals and families to finish courses of treatment, visit doctors, and take the necessary steps to prepare for termination of coverage. While this is little consolation to the individuals and families impacted, it is the furthest Senate leadership would go on a change to the eligibility cut. Please thank Senator Chang-Diaz at 617-722-1673 for her efforts on restoring Commonwealth Care coverage for special status immigrants.

Next Steps: MIRA and its allies will be working to ensure the restoration of Commonwealth Care coverage to 28,000 legal immigrants in Conference Committee.

The **Citizenship for New Americans Program (CNAP) (Line item 4003-0122)** was cut to **\$250,000** in the final Senate budget, which represents a 50% cut from the Final House budget and a decrease of 62% from initial FY09 funding levels. These low levels of funding threaten the ability of providers to maintain their programs and provide needed services to low-income immigrants who wish to become naturalized U.S. citizens, but face numerous economic, legal and other barriers to doing so. There was also a language change in the line item from the House budget that prioritizes services for immigrants who, through naturalization, would move from state-funded benefits (EAEDC) to federally-funded benefits (SSI). Please thank Senator Chandler of Worcester at 617-722-1544 for her efforts to have an amendment adopted that would have increased funding to the House level of \$500,000.

Next Steps: MIRA and its allies will be working to ensure that the Conference Committee includes the \$500,000 House budget appropriation for citizenship in its final version of the budget.

The final Senate budget included **\$28,085,646 for Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) (Line item 7035-0002)**, which qualifies as a victory in this year's budget climate. This figure represents a reduction of more than \$3 million from FY09 levels of \$31.1 million, a reduction of \$1.9 million after this year's 9-C cuts brought the value down to \$29.9 million, and a cut of more than \$1.1 million from the Governor's recommendation of \$29,223,195. No amendment was filed in the Senate because reaching the House level of funding for any line item was considered a major victory. Because ABE/ESOL

received **\$28,085,646** in both the House and Senate budgets, that **will be the amount included in the final version of the budget** coming out of Conference Committee.

The **Workforce Training Fund (WTF) was funded at \$10 million (line item 7003-0701)** in the final Senate budget, a decrease of \$11 million from the final House budget. The Governor and House proposed \$21 million and MIRA was asking for full funding at \$21 million to help facilitate the implementation of a Dedicated Fund for ABE/ESOL that combines funding from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's workplace education grants with funds from the WTF to create a single, streamlined fund that expands resources for workplace education. The WTF is funded exclusively through employer contributions in the form of a surcharge on Unemployment Insurance and, as such, should not impact the General Fund. Please thank Senator McGee of Lynn at 617-722-1350 for filing an amendment that would have increased funding for the WTF to \$21 million. The amendment was partially adopted at an increase of \$5 million.

Next Steps: MIRA and its allies will be working to ensure that the Conference Committee includes the \$21 million House appropriation for the WTF in its final version of the budget.

The line item containing the **Refugee and Immigrant Safety and Empowerment (RISE) Program (4513-1130) took a cut of over 20% down to \$5,058,264** from nearly \$6.4 million and **language referring to "immigrants and refugees" was included the line item.** The cut was not as drastic as that proposed in the Senate Ways & Means budget, as an amendment was adopted to increase the line item by \$1 million and restore language for all programs, including RISE. However, the severe cut in funding threatens the stability of programs and the provision of essential services for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Please thank Senator Eldridge of Acton at 617-722-1120 for working to increase the line item amount and restore language.

Next Steps: MIRA and other advocates and allies will discuss strategy for Conference Committee on both language and funding amounts.

The **MassHealth Outreach Grant Program was funded through Outside Section 73 in the Senate Ways & Means budget, which asks two agencies (HEFA and the Connector) to continue their contributions to outreach at \$2.5 million.** The grant program was eliminated in both the Governor's House 1 budget and the Final House budget. MIRA and its allies were asking for level-funding of \$3.5 million. The inclusion of funding for the MassHealth Outreach Grant Program should be considered a victory, since indications from numerous legislators were that it was unlikely to be included in the budget. The grants are matched at 60.2% by the federal government, so the cost to the Commonwealth would only be \$980,000. Senator Downing's amendment to strengthen and codify the grant programs was withdrawn. Please thank the Senator for his efforts at 617-722-1625.

Next Steps: MIRA and its allies will be working to ensure that the Conference Committee includes the Senate's language on outreach in its final version of the budget.

Please contact your Representative and Senator to urge them to support immigrant communities throughout the Commonwealth in Conference Committee.

Below is the contact information for elected officials, likely members of the Conference Committee, and leadership:

General Number: 617-722-2000
Chairman C. Murphy: 617-722-2990
Representative L'Italien: 617-722-2380
Representative deMacedo: 617-722-2100
Chairman Panagiotakos: 617-722-1630
Senator Brewer: 617-722-1540
Senator Knapik: 617-722-1415
Speaker of the House DeLeo: 617-722-2500
Senate President Murray: 617-722-1500

If you do not know who your State Representative and/or Senator are, please visit:
<http://www.wheredoivotema.com>.

For more information or questions, please contact Toby Guevin at 617-350-5480 x216 or tguevin@miracoalition.org.